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# Self-affirmation Is Key to Success

18 By Leon H. Sullivan

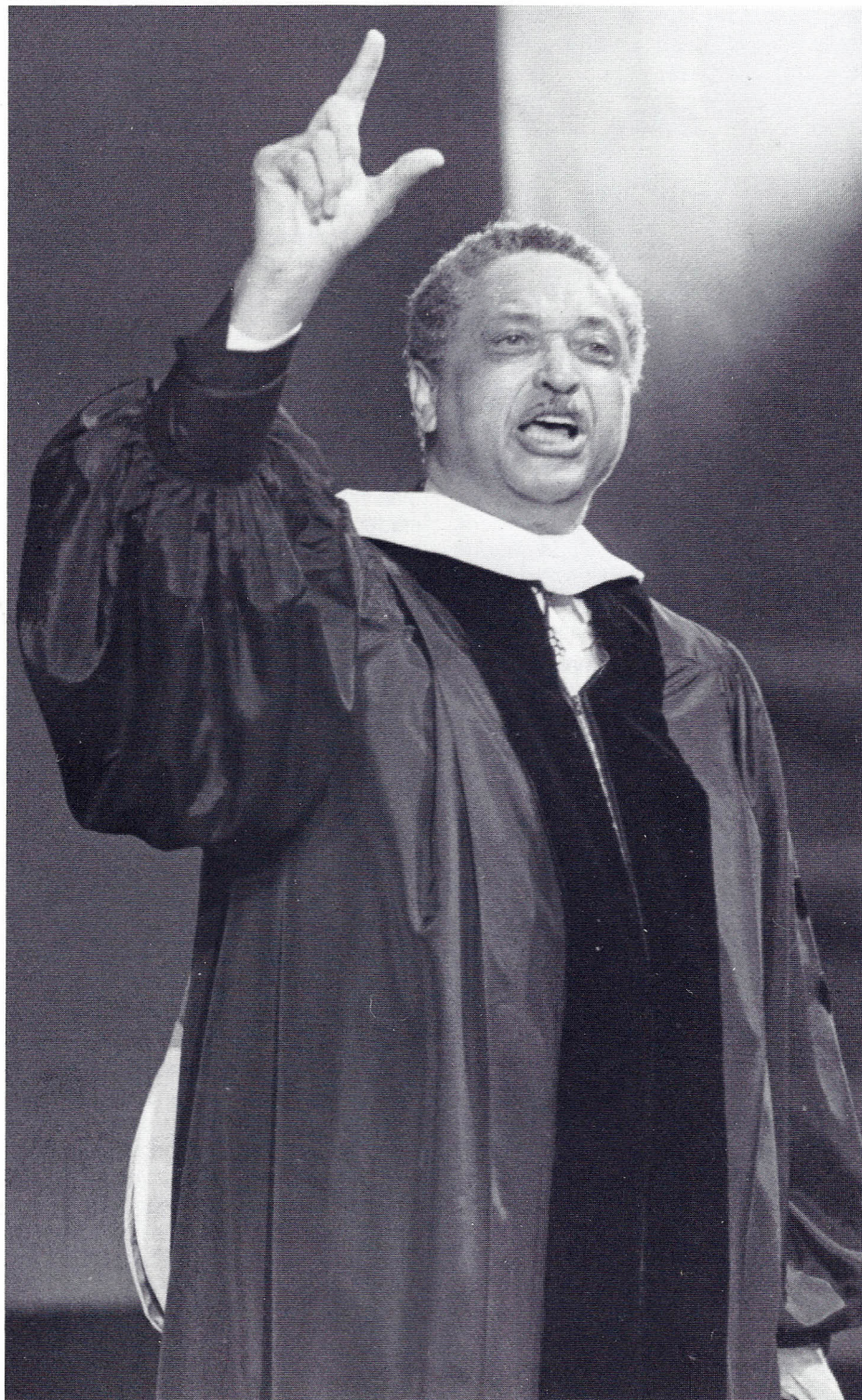
*The following was excerpted from an address by Dr. Leon Sullivan, at Howard University's Opening Convocation, September 24, 1982. Dr. Sullivan is pastor of the Zion Baptist Church in Philadelphia and founder of the Opportunities Industrialization Center, a massive jobs training program.*

**T**he past 30 years have been full of difficulty, of pathos; but also of progress and of promise. Whatever others may say looking back at where we were and where we are today, there has been progress. Black people in America have come a long way; we've done in America what many believed impossible.

Looking back 30 years, just one generation, there were two Americas for most of us. There was Black America, and there was white America—as separate and distinct as two America's could be. I know, because I was born and bred in Black America. Then came the civil rights revolution—building in the '50s and mounting in the '60s and '70s. And these walls [of separation] began to come down.

The civil rights revolution was lead by racially-inspired and dedicated leaders who worked brilliantly and fearlessly for the progress and liberation of the race. Voices began to be heard—from leaders like Adam Clayton Powell, who did more to preach Black awareness and stir Black people to economic and political action than any individual in his day; A. Phillip Randolph, the architect of nonviolent direct action and the conceiver of the March on Washington idea; Malcolm X, who told it like it was and made white people realize that they might run America but they don't own it! Others like Medgar Evers, Thurgood Marshall, Kenneth Clark—[many] alumni of this great institution that has perhaps produced more leaders to lead the Black masses in the arts and sciences than any [other] historic Black institution in America or the world. And we

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can never forget the contributions of Rosa Parks, and Dr. Martin Luther King, whose dream still lives and whose message and voice is recognized everywhere.

As a result of the effort of these and so many others in organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the great civil rights movement began to change things. Two Americas began to become one America. And a new Black man was born, and a new white man was born in this country. A new Black man who was no longer fearful of white people and who began to stand unafraid upon his feet. A new Black man who was no longer afraid of the Ku Klux Klan and who, when they marched by, instead of running away, began to lift up the long white robes to see what was underneath.

And, a new white youth emerged on the scene — symbolizing the story of the mother who all during the summer prepared a little blonde child for the terrible ordeal of going to a newly integrated school. Every day she reminded her little girl of the awful experience ahead. When the first day of school arrived, the mother waved her little daughter off and told her she'd be waiting for her when she returned. At 3 o'clock, the little girl came running back home. The mother, standing at the door, asked what happened. The little child replied: "The first thing they did, Mama, was to sit me down right beside a little Black boy." The mother cried out, "Oh, my poor child! What did you do?" And the little girl replied, "We were both so scared we just held hands all day long."

The truth is many white youths never could understand nor appreciate the racist attitude of their parents, and [this] began to demonstrate itself in a new white youth — stirred by the civil rights movement that awakened the American conscience and gave America hope that the unfulfilled promises of democracy could one day be realized. As a result of the demonstration, the boycotts, and the marches, doors did open and opportunities came. Let no one tell you the civil

rights movement was not helpful to our cause. Most of the people in high public and private places today would never have been there had it not been for the efforts of those who opened those doors. Don't forget the bridge that brought you over; you're here because someone else made it possible. And [what] we must do as we rise is to reach back and help someone else. None of us can succeed alone.

Whatever our progress has been, we cannot live in the past; we must look ahead. A new challenge confronts us as a new conservatism has spread across the nation — not only in fiscal matters but in race relations. This new conservatism is already affecting every aspect of all of our American life. And it's already taken away gains we have made and victories we have won. We have seen the effects of this new conservatism in race relations from the White House, to the State House, to the Court House . . . in attempts to extend such things as tax benefits to institutions that segregate, to water down civil rights enforcement efforts, and retreats from meaningful requirements for civil rights regulations and opportunities. In every community in America where Black people live — large and small — this new conservatism is being felt. Black America must not permit it to remain unchallenged.

It is essential that America know we do not intend to give up the ground we have gained these past years. I'm beginning to feel a new awareness; I am encouraged. If this trend to delete and take away the progress we have made in America persists, I suggest that 30 million Black Americans go on general strike across the nation and immobilize the country. I suggest, let us remain home in a national protest against these efforts [should] they continue — office workers, telephone operators, domestics, factory workers, teachers, taxi drivers, subway operators, students, professors and preachers. We must be prepared, if necessary, to act massively to let America know we have been through segregation and discrimi-

nation in America before, and we're not going through it anymore.

I have so far spoken of group assertion. For the future of the race, the greater need is for self-affirmation. I have spoken of progress from the civil rights revolution and the benefits we have seen, particularly for the Black middle class. But looking at the greater need for the Black masses, the [important] thing now is for a mighty effort to move ahead in self-affirmation.

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***"It is time we unbrain-wash our brain-washed minds."***

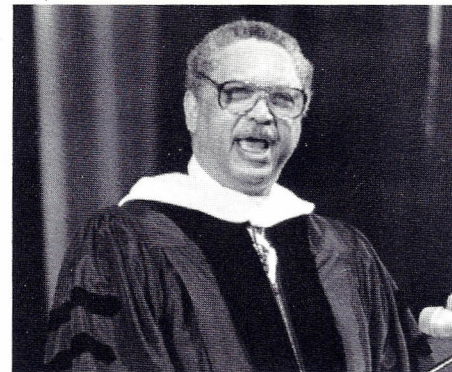
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Looking at the requirements of the present and the future, something new is [needed] to move us into the 21st century — what I call the 3 C's for the continuing advancement of the race.

The first C we must teach is the C of *confidence*. We must teach our youth confidence, to believe in themselves and their capabilities and their futures. For 300 years, attempts have been made — conscious and unconscious — to take away the confidence of Black people and to strip us of our self-pride and our identities and to keep us in mental servitude. We must not let this to continue. For 300 years, the teachings of the world had put locks on our minds and they're still fastened with most of us. The inferiority of Black to white has been taught us in all aspects of our lives. It's been taught us in the books we've read, in the movies we've seen, in the TV shows we watch, in the songs we sing, and even in the foods we eat. Because, when cake is black it's Devil Food and when it's white it's Angel Food.

It is time we unbrain-wash our brain-washed minds. With every capability at our disposal, we must teach our youth who they are, what they are, and what they can become. We must teach them of their history of greatness and achievement, and we must teach them of their contributions to the world. We must let them know the great individuals of color who helped shape the course of literature and





20 history, such as: Aesop, the great Black fable writer; Hannibal, the great Carthaginian General; Pushkin, the great Black Russian poet; Dr. [Charles] Drew, the great Black medical scholar; and Dr. Ralph Bunche, the great Nobel Laureate. As never before, we must stress the first C of confidence and teach our youth, from the time they're able to comprehend, to believe in themselves and to carry that confidence in every experience of their lives. We must create and support Black-oriented publishing institutions that carry this message abroad. We need pamphlets and books to tell the facts about ourselves.

We must begin to use computers and develop software to see that the stories about ourselves and our accomplishments are taken into the living rooms and kitchens of our homes. If others can tell about themselves, we can too. The Howard University [Press] should be used and supported to help bring this about. We must teach Black people at home and abroad confidence, and our young people confidence. We must teach them to be like one of those two Black boys who, seeing a jet plane flying overhead, one said: "Oh, I wish I was white so I could fly that plane like that white boy." But the other one said: "If he'll give me the throttle, I'll fly it as Black as I am."

The second C we must stress for the advancement of our race, is the C for *competence*. There's no substitute in today's world for competence and excellence. We must stress learning and preparations, from the young to the old, for without this attribute we would not be able to compete equally in tomorrow's world. We all know this is a highly technical age of computers and robotics—tied together by electronic machines. In this kind of world, without the ability to participate technically our people will economically and socially fall further and further behind. Already in many of our American cities, one-third of the Black population depends on government relief of one form or another. And too often, our educational

levels are so low that we cannot compete for jobs even when they are available. Functional illiteracy is rampant among our people.

We must raise our competitive skills, and we must improve our educational and scientific knowledge. We have the capability to do it, we have the ability to do it. What remains for us is the will to do it. The future requires knowledge and self-discipline. This means we must shift our emphasis. In the past, we put our emphasis on what we [did] from the waist down. We must shift and put our emphasis on the waist up. From the waist down, we've become the best runners in the world, the best dancers in the world, the best jumpers in the world. All this is good. Now we must put emphasis on the development from the waist up and become the best thinkers in the world, the best craftsmen in the world, the best technicians in the world, and the people with the greatest spirit of unity in the world.

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***"We have no permanent political friends. We must support those who support us."***

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Finally, I suggest we emphasize the third C of *cooperation*. We must learn to work together and to cooperate. In my view, the greatest enemy facing Blacks today is not racism or discrimination but jealousy and envy among ourselves. When we get Black people in America and in the world cooperating and sharing, the walls of discrimination will come down.

We must learn how to cooperate politically in the use of our votes, and to accrue the benefits of our political power. We must learn to devise the utilization of our votes in an individual way, so that no political party in America has our vote in its back pocket. As Black people, we cannot put our confidence in one political organization or political individuals. We have no permanent political friends. We must

support those who support us. We must trust no one — not even our white liberal friends. We must appreciate them, but we can not depend on them because they have already double-crossed us too many times.

Economically, we must learn to pool our resources to build and to own something. With all our problems, we're not paupers. We have more than a \$150 billion in purchasing power. We must learn to use it for our progress and the progress of America. I know that economic cooperation is possible; I've seen it work; I know what it can do. We must use it in economic divestment campaigns and selected buying campaigns, as being done by groups like Operation PUSH and the NAACP.

Let me describe how economic cooperation among a few people can work, and what it can do. A number of years ago I asked 200 members of my church to invest \$10 a month for 36 months in a self-help program to [build] homes for people to live in and places for people to work. At the end of the first year, these 200 people had accumulated enough money to build a million-dollar garden apartment complex. At the end of the second year, there were 600 members putting \$10 a month down for 36 months. At the end of that time, we had accumulated enough money to build Progress Plaza, the largest shopping center built by Black people in the world. Later, a young Black couple in my church went to rent an apartment in an all-white apartment house. They came back and told me they were refused because they were Black. The next week we bought the apartment house.

We built factories, human service centers, and we rehabilitated an entire neighborhood. So, I know what can be done when our people cooperate. There's a great need for economic cooperation among us. And the development of hundreds, and even thousands, of economic self-help societies in groups of 50s and 100s—starting in churches and lodges, in neighborhood organizations and on school campuses.



Through this kind of initiative — Black people cooperating and investing their money in self-help societies — we can create credit unions, home building and rehabilitation programs, build shopping centers, acquire and develop factories, and create stock investment groups with voices in stockholders meetings that help influence the policies of the businesses of America. With this kind of self-help network, we can lay a foundation that within the next generation can provide us with economic independence as we've never seen before. We must plant the seeds and help them grow. In future years, we must save, invest and build, so we can have something of our own.

In America, to be strong, you must own something. We must begin to build an economic base for our children, because as the song goes, *"Mama might have, and Daddy might have, but God bless the child that's got his own."* These self-help societies can become a movement from every campus. I'm aware many of these efforts will fail because the scope of what I'm talking about is broader than anything we've ever attempted before. But many efforts will succeed, and in time build discipline and ownership among us. We will show results of unbelievable magnitude as thousands and thousands of talented young Black men and women come out of business schools and colleges with accounting and business backgrounds. We must find them and use them to help build this economic base for the future. We must learn to cooperate, remembering that ten sticks united are stronger than one stick standing alone.

Internationally, we must learn to cooperate in matters affecting Black people around the world. Let me give you an example of a great need in the world today. In the Republic of South Africa, there are 30 million of our Black brothers and sisters living in bondage under a ruthless and inhumane system called apartheid. We all decry the system and verbally condemn it. Many of us complain but very few [of us] do anything about it. As many

of you know, there are efforts underway to try to get some changes in that land. I've been a part of trying to get some non-violent changes in that land. I initiated principles and guidelines for companies to comply with. There have been some changes. Companies are now desegregating their plants; Blacks are being elevated to management and supervisory jobs; companies are beginning to pay equal pay for equal work; thousands of new scholarships are being provided. For the first time, Black unions are being recognized, and Blacks are beginning to supervise whites in South Africa.

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***"This Congress and this Administration have not only tilted towards South Africa, they have leaned towards South Africa."***

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The [Sullivan] Principles have become a catalyst for change. They are an important breakthrough, but it is all still so small compared to the need. We need pressure on these companies to do more to help change that system. Corporations will only do as much as they have to. Corporations are impersonal; they are [for] profit making; they are not humanitarians. We need help to get some of these companies who are dragging their feet to stand up to their social responsibilities and be monitored for what they do. Frankly, I would prefer the companies not be there at all. But, since they are, they must be pressured to help change that condition. Either they should help change that situation or they should get out of South Africa altogether. You can help. There are companies that we know are not doing what they should do. Take that list of companies, and if you have holdings in those companies, you should divest your stock from them. If they sell commodities you eat, you should stop buying their product.

This Congress and this Administration have not only tilted towards South Africa,

they have leaned towards South Africa. We should let the Administration and this Congress know that we want a change in that policy. Banks lend money to the South Africa government to help support its military and its police. This is what you should do to a hundred banks: if you have deposits in those banks, you should take your deposits out and picket those banks until they change their policies. You should support, as Black people, a ban on the sale of the Krugerrand in America. You should ask for an end to all new investments by companies in South Africa.

You can do things if you wake up out of your apathy and begin to help those who are trying to do something. If six million Jews can upset the world for Israel, 30 million Black Americans can help change the foreign policy for Black people in South Africa. You have power, but you must learn to use it. You must learn the third C of cooperation.

What we need in the world among us is a Black connection. The French have a French Connection, the Italians have an Italian Connection, the Irish have an Irish Connection. There's no reason why we should not have a Black Connection with every Black man and woman, every boy and girl in America, and in the world, working together for the common good: Cooperation, a Black Connection around the world, economically, politically and socially. It can be done. I call on you to take these 3 C's with you — the C of *confidence*, the C of *competence* and the C of *cooperation*. □